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Selling Printed Cottons in Mid-Nineteenth Century India. John Matheson of Glasgow and Scottish Turkey Red.

Introduction

Almost twenty years ago, Roy Church observed in a survey of products, firms, marketing and consumers since the mid-nineteenth century that historians should give more attention to such elementary questions as ‘what firms produce and for whom.’ He went on to ask, ‘how did entrepreneurs and managers gain information about consumers, how was it employed, and with what effects on products made, in terms of prices, quality, design or style?’¹ As he correctly observed, these issues can only be addressed through labour-intensive empirical studies; they also require the survival of the sort of evidence that allows us to draw conclusions about consumers and how they shape business behaviour. The Church call was recently developed for quality textiles, perhaps the greatest of the consumer-driven commodities past and present, in a period of decline where evidence is commonly available. Clayton’s study of the mid-twentieth century British cotton industry exploits modern marketing campaigns in an age when market research and advertising techniques were well developed and the government-founded Cotton Board took a direct role in promoting sales of printed cottons at home.² But what about cotton selling a hundred years before that, when it was still one of the leading manufacturing sector in Britain with an international sales profile, but before the effective formulation and theorising of mass marketing techniques such as consumer research or product strategy and branding?³

This essay is about British-made cotton textiles that were sold in India and considers the market and sales information that was gathered mid-century through commission agents in Bombay and through personal observation by a Glasgow-based cotton entrepreneur. It looks

at the use of this information for the product development of high-quality Turkey red dyed and printed cottons, as manufactured by one of the three major Scottish firms whose main market was India – William Stirling & Sons – who, with John Orr Ewing & Co., and Archibald Orr Ewing & Co., merged in 1898 to form the United Turkey Red Company Ltd.⁴ The study draws on two exceptional sources; the first is a pattern book for the years 1853 to 1869 that combines written commentary from a number of agents in India on their printed cotton sales along with textiles samples sent from Bombay to the Stirling offices in Glasgow.⁵ The second is a published tour account by John Matheson (1817-1878), Stirling's managing partner, who visited India in the early 1860s to see the system of retail distribution for himself and to gather information on consumers, on market segmentation and more generally on the Indian economy.⁶ These sources are enhanced by a commentary of the same decade from David Bremner, an early commercial journalist, who published a lengthy description of Stirling's print and dye works in the *Scotsman* newspaper in 1869 as part of a series on the industries of Scotland.⁷

The British cotton industry has been a major field of economic and business history for decades and has also engaged the interests of historians of material culture and globalization. Technology and innovation have formed the focus of one area of inquiry, along with the parallel preoccupation with why the industry ultimately failed.⁸ An array of studies is concerned with the social and cultural impact of international cotton production on British consumers.⁹ Another body of literature looks at global markets and international design exchange from Asia to Europe, particularly in the eighteenth century.¹⁰ Most of the nineteenth century discussion is focused on standardized products such as grey cloths and shirtings. Though a smaller sector, it is widely accepted that the cotton finishing industry making prints for fashionable clothing or domestic furnishings was more generally successful

than standardized production – employing large numbers of skilled workers, generating healthy profits for the owners and performing well in the face of rising overseas competition.¹¹ Studies of printed cottons tend to focus on the economic dynamics of competing European or Indian manufacturers or on the mechanism of the trade through the activities and organizational structures of merchants, shippers and commission agents.¹² There is limited engagement with design relative to the cultural characteristics of market creation, particularly in the mid and later nineteenth century. We know little about how entrepreneurs sought to understand and shape their sales profiles even among British consumers and there are few accounts of how British-made higher end prints entered and performed in their principal market which, like plain cottons, was India. This essay seeks to fill some of these gaps and along the way casts light on why the India market for what was usually called ‘fancy’ cottons was so hard to enter with sustained success. Following a short account of the rise and demise of Turkey red cotton printing in Scotland, the first section, focused on the India agent commentaries, considers the variety of piece sizes, patterns, colors and packaging that was necessary for successful printed cotton sales in India. It shows that despite the existence of much continuity in traditional pattern and color preferences, there were also seasonal changes in demand and an appetite for novelty patterns. Developing some of these themes, the second section interrogates what contemporaries, including John Matheson and his agents, understood about their Indian markets, the bazaar-based market intermediaries and their ultimate consumers. It also considers the limits to the western businesses ability to shape consumer taste. The essay concludes that despite the existence of much relevant information conveyed from India and evidence of the use of this to inform production for the India market there was a blindness to the realities of India’s complex evolving dress cultures which had implications for product development in Britain. Moreover, saturated markets were addressed through a constant emphasis on the quality of

the product, an ever-increasing variety of piece sizes and patterns and the use of elaborate, expensive packaging for retail sales which were not sustainable in the longer term.

Inevitably, failure to maintain a presence in the India market was rooted in the complex social, cultural and economic context in India in which British producers and agents were placed. A modernizing dynamic largely under Indian control coexisted with an evolving attachment to ideas of tradition in Indian business and bazaar practices that outside commentators imperfectly understood, as is apparent from what follows in some of the written observations of John Matheson in the 1860s. As the century advanced, the Indian taste for its own manufactures, including red-dyed and printed cottons, was served by new and easily available synthetic dyes and machine production of cheap and fashionable goods.¹³ Design schools in India, which were founded by colonial officials, many of them Scots, generated local designers with a better appreciation of Indian consumer tastes than those in Glasgow, however well informed the latter.¹⁴ Far from being left behind, Indian artisans evolved with changing demand, and were themselves the originators of new and original designs that easily matched those coming from Glasgow or Manchester.¹⁵ Indian bazaar marketing, seen as fossilized by outsiders, operated according to its own evolving values and norms and happily embraced a changing pattern of supplies from British manufacturers as well as local factories or sources elsewhere in the world.¹⁶ The economic or cultural evolution of the textile industry in India was not entirely divorced from that of Britain, of course, with many British industrialists, including some of the Scottish Turkey red entrepreneurs, also having an interest in manufacturing in India, but the ultimate fate of Scottish Turkey red in India was shaped by global as well as local conditions.

Scottish Turkey Red

There were many types of dyed and printed cottons in the nineteenth century, with the relative cost of the natural dyes that were involved and the complexity of the dyeing and printing processes giving rise to a high added value for the commodities produced.¹⁷ The term ‘Turkey red’ refers to a dyeing process that was used to create a bright and fast red that withstood strong sunshine and frequent washing without fading. The process was expensive and only fully perfected in the 1830s, but the end product, either plain red or over printed using a variety of print techniques, enjoyed a wide popularity and was reputed to be the most profitable of all the cotton finishing sectors in the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Outside Britain, the main market was in India, with sales also in South America, the Middle East, Indonesia, China and Japan. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Turkey red cotton was produced in a remarkable variety of prints, finishes and sizes of cloth sizes including printed bandannas and ‘dress’ pieces for saris or sarongs.¹⁹ Some of these were still made on handlooms and the finest dress pieces, such as saris with complex patterned ends and borders, were printed using craft techniques.²⁰ In common with many high quality cotton printers in Lancashire, all of the Scottish Turkey red firms managed their own marketing at home and abroad, rather than relying on merchant intermediaries and shipping houses, as was usual among the plain goods weavers and finishers at the lower end of the market.²¹

Several Scottish firms were noted manufacturers of Turkey red cottons. One of the earliest was William Stirling & Sons, which was founded in Glasgow in the mid-eighteenth century by a merchant for London-printed cottons, with production moving to the Vale of Leven in Dunbartonshire in the 1770s to take advantage of plentiful water and space for bleach fields.²² By mid-century, Stirling was the largest firm of its type in Scotland and occupied

two distinct manufacturing sites, the Cordale Printworks and the Dalquhurn Dyeworks, employing almost 1500 workers in 1868, many practicing hand printing techniques to achieve a high quality output alongside machine printing. Designers for the industry were based in Glasgow.²³ Stirling's annual output, mostly for export, was almost nineteen million yards of cloth in 1868, about half of this patterned, along with 800,000 lbs of dyed yarn. They also printed large quantities of patterned bandanna handkerchiefs, which were used as scarfs and coverings, produced at a rate of 4000 a day according to order.²⁴ Stirling's commercial affairs were conducted from premises in central Glasgow, which were extended in the late 1850s with the building of a new complex of warehouse, salesroom and offices at 138-140 West George Street.²⁵ In the mid 1860s, the immediate neighbors included the offices of the London-based dye manufacturers, Simpson, Maule & Nicholson, the inventors of Magenta-based dyes and various commission agents, some of whose names appear in Stirling's business records.²⁶

John Matheson, Stirling's senior managing partner, commissioned the new Glasgow premises. He had entered the business in 1846, previously working as a clerk for a Glasgow cotton-broker. He started in charge of Stirling's Glasgow salesroom and then moved onto the Vale of Leven works where he made many technical innovations and expanded output. He was interested in the commercial life of Glasgow, active as a director of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and appointed President of the Chamber in 1872.²⁷ He gave papers on commercial and financial subjects to bodies like the Social Science Association and British Association. He also took a detailed interest in the marketing of his printed cottons sufficient to take a trip to India via the overland route in 1861-2, just before the opening of the Suez Canal, which he published as a travel account in 1870, with his observations on the manners of the people and the conduct of business.²⁸ Accompanied by his wife, Matheson

travelled with a Glasgow friend and seasoned India traveler, William Mackinnon, a shipping entrepreneur (and his wife), who was also a West George Street neighbor. Mackinnon's aim was to petition government officials for contracts for a new shipping line from Bombay to Calcutta.²⁹ Other Glasgow businessmen who were frequent India visitors included John Muir of the old cotton firm of James Findlay & Co., who visited seven times in the 1870s and '80s.³⁰ Matheson made a second India trip in 1875. Matheson's *England to Delhi*, which describes his first trip, gives a vivid account of India in the early 1860s, just a few years after the East India Company had ceased operations, through a journey that was largely commercial in its purpose, reflecting a wish to better know in person a country familiar 'through the medium of a close mercantile connections'.³¹

The 1860s marked a high point in the Scottish Turkey red entrepreneur's optimistic engagement with the India market. John Matheson was convinced of a bright future ahead for a modernising economy, with increasingly westernised consumers rising 'above the shadows of ignorance and mysticism into the light and liberty of day' and growth in fine exports to India for firms like his own.

It is evident that in these and the other statistics of trade to which I have alluded at intervals, we perceive the source alike of past prosperity and future hope...so noble is the vocation allotted to commerce in the economy of national life.³²

Yet this optimism was not sustained. By the mid-1870s the Scottish Turkey red firms were struggling for market share and moved away from design innovation and multiple lines of 'fancy' textiles towards a standardized output of mostly traditional prints and plain red cloth along with red yarn for weaving in India.³³ The reasons for this are complex and include increased overseas and particularly Asian production and the widespread adoption of German synthetic dyes, which were cheaper than natural Turkey red. More important still were the

structural changes in the organization of the trade as the local agency houses mutated into bigger international corporations with limited interest in niche textile markets once the founding partners had retired and their successors moved their expertise into international shipping and related investments.³⁴ The agency houses that survived in India became subsidiaries of firms focused on the provision of transport infrastructure and backward investment in the Indian and South East Asian economy in areas such as jute, tea, wood products and mining.³⁵ Such companies communicated market information through swiftly-published market reports, which encouraged a simplification in textile products and developed new financial arrangements with the firms for whom they acted, often requiring a monopoly agreement for either the markets served or classes of goods supplied. They were not interested in innovative design or chasing after specialist markets. Some invested in factory-based synthetic Turkey red cotton printing in India to the detriment of their British clients.³⁶

The Turkey red entrepreneurs were willing participants in many of the new developments and made spectacular fortunes on their own account, but their firms were less fortunate. By the close of the nineteenth century, the industry was faltering and a defensive merger of the three great Scottish firms occurred in 1898.³⁷ But even this rationalization, which saw many pattern lines and printing techniques abandoned and a great loss of skilled labor in the printing shops, the industry was remained vulnerable to sudden shifts of fortune arising from the affairs of the merchants with whom they conducted business. This was highlighted during a routine Board of Directors' meeting in Glasgow on Wednesday 15 July 1903, as recorded in the minutes.

A telegram received during the course of the meeting indicated that Ewing & Co.

Calcutta had suspended payment. Examination of the position revealed that they had

Stocks in the value of about £23,000...Expression was given to the hope that the firm of Ewing & Co. would be able to resume business and the position be such as would admit of the Company supporting them.³⁸

Ewing & Co., once a major trading consortium, was declared bankrupt a short while later, entailing great losses for the United Turkey Red Co. Ltd.³⁹ Government contracts kept the ailing industry afloat during two world wars before Scottish Turkey red production finally ceased in the early 1950s.

From our perspective there is an almost inexorable character to the narrative sketched above, but for John Matheson in the 1860s, reading his agent's recommendations, actively liaising between the printing shop and warehouses, commissioning new designs and even visiting India himself, there were several decades of conviction that India could be a viable long-term market for 'fancy' cottons and for a while there was a great commercial commitment to this end. So, it is worth looking in detail at the business of selling printed cotton in India through his eyes and through the information sources on which he could draw.

Pieces, Patterns, Pricing and Packaging

In addition to their ledgers and letter books, textile-printing and fancy weaving companies maintained another type of business record called 'pattern books' containing small samples of fabrics and designs, sometimes annotated with numbers or brief text, though only rarely providing much information on the patterns themselves.⁴⁰ But there is modest survival of such records to the present, their meaning is often hard to interpret and they are little used by business historians.⁴¹ Most pattern books, including those in the Scottish Turkey red collection now held in the National Museums Scotland, were manufacturing tools,

documenting different printing techniques and colors for numbered patterns for use on the factory floor.⁴² The Turkey red collection also includes a few ‘show books’ for the Glasgow warerooms or for use by travelling salesmen; some books of designs registered for copyright; and a handful of order and consignment books, showing samples of the textiles that were dispatched to customers. There is one unusual volume in the Turkey red collection, the so-called Bombay Pattern Book (BPB) which comprises textile samples attached to letters sent to William Stirling & Sons in their Glasgow offices between 1853 and 1869, mostly from commission agents in Bombay. The letters provide detailed commentaries on samples and their design characteristics, color combinations and fabric quality and sizes, along with observations on prices, market demand or conditions and make suggestions for consignments to be dispatched that were most likely to sell in the season immediately ahead or in particular places in India. All of the samples are for textiles that were used for clothing worn by Indians above the ranks of the peasantry. Many of the letters include patterns produced by rival firms along with market information on the firms in question, with recommendations for copying, a practice that was widespread in Britain and Europe from the eighteenth century.⁴³ Though design copyright existed in Britain by the early nineteenth century and Turkey red manufacturers registered some of their designs, it was notoriously hard to enforce and copyright protection for design in India was impossible given the common use of traditional motifs such as the ‘Paisley’ pattern.⁴⁴

Although not foregrounded in this present essay, the gathering of information in India on pattern or color preferences and sales performance was an essential underpinning to a complex textile design process at home.⁴⁵ Edmund Potter (1802-1883) the Manchester-born calico printer and politician estimated that in the 1850s there were c.600 textile pattern designers and sketch makers enjoying ‘constant employment’ in Britain, most of them trained

locally through the design schools that were founded from the 1830s.⁴⁶ An estimated c.200 of these were based in Scotland. Some, though a minority, were independent designers who worked across different textile fields, including design for fine weaving – seen prominently in Scotland in the damask linen industry – which was a more specialist and lucrative area of work than design for prints. Calico printing and Turkey red firms usually employed their own in-house designers, often advertising for such personnel as in 1855 when Alexander Orr Ewing & Co., through the pages of the *Glasgow Herald*, announced ‘WANTED, a DESIGNER of first rate taste and ability practically acquainted with the working of Turkey Red Printed Goods. To a thoroughly competent party liberal encouragement will be offered. To be employed in Town.’⁴⁷ These designers, as suggested here, were based in offices and warehouse premises in central Glasgow where they took instruction from the clerks and business managers who dealt with overseas correspondents and made decisions about patterns to go into or out of production. The names of these individuals are mostly unrecorded, though one who later found modest celebrity as a botanical artist, was Dunbartonshire-born John Buchanan (1819-1898), foreman in the 1840s in the drawing shop of Glasgow’s longest surviving Turkey red firm, Henry Monteith & Co., famous bandana manufacturer, who was apprentice trained in the Vale of Leven as a pattern drawer and later worked for a Manchester firm before settling in Glasgow.⁴⁸ Pattern designers created new designs and also engaged in the competitive process of design registration for copyright, which required fine drawings on paper.⁴⁹ Some of the original designs were intended for the India market, as illustrated in Fig 1. As important as the designers in the Glasgow offices were the pattern drawers (also called sketch makers), who worked alongside the engravers, block cutters and printers in the factories, which, in the case of the Turkey red firms, were twenty-five miles away in rural Dunbartonshire. Under instruction from Glasgow, they made practical drawings from original designs for translation into blocks or plates and they copied

designs from the patterns of rival firms or from traditional Indian prints as supplied by agents. They and the designers invented ‘new’ designs from motifs already in production through a cut-and-paste system of pattern creation that is illustrated in Fig 2, which shows pattern pieces mounted as a collage in an original configuration destined for India. Fig 3 shows a simpler system of pattern design involving a sample of printed cotton with a border and infill made up of flowers which are replaced at regular intervals by a dancing woman or a peacock, with written labels indicating where the motifs should go.

Like all British cotton printing firms, Scottish manufacturers purchased some of their finest patterns in France through agents in Paris with access to specialist French or Swiss designers, though these prestige acquisitions were mostly for the upper end of the British fashion market.⁵⁰ For the India market, however, it was a hybrid system of copying coupled with original input based largely on information and patterns supplied by the agents abroad which dominated the design process. An illustration is offered in Fig 4, comprising a page from the BPB, with a commentary and sample of 1863 from the agent A. H. Huschke & Co. The page includes a large portion of a fine handkerchief or bandana with a flowery border produced by Glasgow rival Henry Monteith & Co. and described in the commentary as having ‘found much favour in the bazaar... in fact more than any other border...’. It was recommended for copying, with infilling patterns of ‘sets, stripes and sets, and small pines.’⁵¹ Hence the Bombay Pattern Book is more than just a commentary on market conditions in India, or a primitive form of market research. It also offers insights to the operation of a team-based and pragmatic design process.

The first entry in the BPB is a page of miscellaneous textile samples from India, one bearing a label that states ‘to show texture of cloth for sarees’ followed by sketches for a scarf with fringes described as ‘suitable for Bombay’, attached to a letter dated March 1853. The attention given to the latter is telling, for the market for scarfs in India was vast and growing, with, as Matheson observed, an

increasing variety of styles and pattern...bright coloring being greatly prized, more especially the celebrated Turkey red ground, illuminated with yellow and green, or full chintz flowers and figures, with large objects in the form of pines and peacocks at either end.⁵²

The last BPB entry is a collection of ‘samples of prints sold [in India] by Graham & Co’ (a Manchester company), with prices achieved, sent to Stirling on 20 January 1869 to show the trade of a rival company. Between these dates, covering almost sixteen years, including the year of Matheson’s first India trip and ending just as his published account of the journey was going to press, the volume contains 124 separate communications with samples from nineteen mainly Bombay-based agency houses.

The market information contained in the BPB is dominated by details on prices achieved or predicted, illustrated with textile samples, sent by agents or their clerks, who, being based in city-center warehouses, gained insights to fluctuating demand through their daily interactions with Indian merchants and bazaar retailers. This system of information gathering was studied and described by Matheson, from the agents and their offices, to the brokers who operated the auctions for cut-price damaged goods and the local retailers seated cross-leg outside their shops.⁵³ Basic market information on India cottons was available through newspaper sources and some big trading houses produced printed monthly market reports from the 1850s.⁵⁴ But whilst giving useful insights for standardized textile goods such as grey cloths, these offered

little of value in the ‘fancy’ cotton trades. So, a typical statement from the August 1853 market report given in the *Straits Times* – ‘Handkerchiefs – we have no change to report in the demand, price, or stocks of these goods. None but favourite patterns can be placed’ – gives no indication of what the ‘favourite patterns’ might comprise.⁵⁵ Compare this with a typical ‘memo of musters’ from Grey & Co in Bombay dated 25 February 1857, which supplied patterned samples (with prices) for copying, with instructions that Stirling send 150 cases (with eighteen dozen pieces per case) containing ‘an assortment of Turkey red pink handkerchiefs’ with secondary color-ways in green and blue, and a request that these be produced in 25 inch squares rather than the usual 23 by 28 inches.⁵⁶ Moreover, the price data supplied by agents was almost always shaped and contextualized with written commentaries on patterns and weave, product presentation, the quantities of similar products already on sale through rival houses and issues of seasonality of sale, or market niches for different prints according to ethnic, religious or regional sales patterns. Throughout the period the agents dealt with pressures of oversupply from Britain coupled with lumpy and sometimes unpredictable demand and they stressed as a matter of routine that product appearance and fabric quality provided a key competitive edge.

The first criteria that was usually noted in market reports was the actual patterns required at the time, illustrated through the provision of samples of successful goods to be reproduced or copied – or sometimes also of unsuccessful goods to be discontinued. The samples contained in the BPB included Stirlings’ own designs and also those of rival British companies or locally produced by Indian craftsmen using hand techniques. Design practices in the British Turkey red and printed calico industry were heavily biased towards copying, including outright copyright theft, along with the reproduction of traditional designs with few adaptations, but there was innovation and some novelty designs clearly sold well.⁵⁷ Over the

sixteen years that the BPB covers, there was much continuity in the designs requested or highlighted for copying with a focus on what were routinely called ‘Swiss chintz’ patterns, normally small florals or paisleys which were used in women’s garments and formed the filling patterns for sari dress pieces. Stripes and zigzags were also in continuous demand particularly for men’s turbans. Of newer styles of patterns coming into vogue over the course of the 1860s, the most prominent, which were normally found on handkerchiefs such as the one illustrated in Fig. 4, were large floral motifs of a type that also sold well in Britain. But though there was constant demand for certain patterns, there were seasonal changes in the colors that were popular in the market and samples were commonly sent for copying in different color-ways. So, in an order for zigzag patterns in November 1866, the following detail was attached to the numbered samples.

No. 46-58. T[urkey]red prints all suitable assortments. 5 cases of each assortment at a time – of no. 46 only one sample sent, but the contents of the case to be as follows, 25 pieces as per sample; 5 pieces all white stripes; 20 pieces all yellow stripes. 50 pieces in a case.⁵⁸

The original sample was red with yellow and white zigzag stripes, the pattern achieved through discharge printing which could generate either white or yellow depending on the discharge process employed.

As in any modern retail fashion market, color was as important in Indian textiles as it was in Europe, though the European taste-palette favored more muted tones.⁵⁹ Certain colors had traditional associations or were linked to particular religions – green was popular among Muslim customers, orange among Hindus - but demand also shifted with the seasons and fashions. Many samples sent for copying were in last-season’s colors with a request that a different color combination be tried for the coming season. ‘If this pattern [zigzag] can be

sent in fast colours the broad stripe should be sky blue where it is green and T[urkey] red where there is pink' is a typical instruction, on this occasion from Huschke & Co.⁶⁰ Or, in a recommendation for Swiss chintz prints from Herman, Lucius & Co., 'If in pattern no 6 [paisley] yellow were substituted for black it would be an improvement. 40-50 cases could easily be sold during the season.'⁶¹ Even the exact shade would be specified - 'This is the shade of green that we want [sample attached] and this is what we object to [sample attached]'.⁶² The agents were familiar with the printing techniques that achieved the colors in the fabrics they sold, as another commentary on green reveals, this time from Grey & Co.

No. 868 Not at all liked. The green colour, from being printed over the red loses its effect entirely and shows as a very dull brown. If you could produce a bright green like this [sample attached] they might succeed.⁶³

No only color, but the brightness of the red that was sent to Bombay, along with the quality and weight of the fabric, formed a constant focus for agents' advice and information.

A very careful attention should be paid to the colour and cloth of the samples forwarded. The colour should be of best Turkey red, the cloth to be thick and the weight must be equal to that mentioned against some numbers in the list. Slight differences in colour or cloth make a large difference in price here, careful attention should therefore be paid to the remnants added to each number.⁶⁴

The last comment in this communication from Sir Charles Forbes & Co. highlights one of the constant challenges that faced the Turkey red manufacturers who used natural dyeing methods based on extract of madder root, which was a complex process with variable results. Sea damage to stock was another source of concern that was commonly reported and a frequent subject of newspaper reports. A letter of February 1866, containing a 'muster of our own goods' from Huschke & Co. included three samples of 'our own printed mulls' sent to

show 'condition as regards color, cloth and style.' The goods had been shipped on the *Cameronian* and the *Anne Dorothea* and had been damaged by sea water in transit, causing discoloration and rendering the muster only suitable for disposal through auction, which happened in India as in Britain on damaged stock.⁶⁵ Fungal damage from poor storage in transit was also a problem which impacted on prices, with samples frequently returned to Stirlings by way of explanation, as in September 1865 in a letter from Nicol & Co. enclosing a 'bit of velvet out of [consignment] 37/40 sent to show mildew an allowance of Rs275 had to be made on the four cases.'⁶⁶

The size of textile pieces was closely specified by the agents' reports, showing that Turkey red manufacturers produced printed goods in a great variety of sizes, which in turn were supplied by weavers in Glasgow or Manchester, many working on handlooms, which were good for achieving variety in piece size, but not always to a consistency in weight or weave. Handkerchiefs ranged from 23 to 30 inches square, with oblongs also sold. Standard textile lengths were 39 inches wide and 20 yards long, but goods were manufactured in pieces measuring 32 inches by 28 yards. Ewart Latham & Co. in 1867 sent a sample for copying that had been sold by Bombay dealer B & A Harmusjee and was just 24 inches by 28 yards, which will have been locally produced using craft techniques.⁶⁷ Turban twills were 12 to 14 inches wide. The edges on fabrics were sometimes specified, as in January 1858 when Huschke & Co. reported that a plain red cotton velvet was selling well because it was the only one in the market, but that in future it was to have two selvedges not a cut edge as supplied.⁶⁸ Saris and scarves with borders and end designs were typically up to 60 inches wide and three to four yards long and the design composition and size of the borders and ends were carefully specified for execution by hand, as was also observed by David Bremner in his newspaper report on the Stirling print works in 1869.

The dress pieces are short, being only from 1 1/2 to 8 yards in length; and owing to that and other technical causes, it would be unprofitable to print them on a cylinder machine, so they are done by the block method.⁶⁹

The Bombay commission agents communicated daily with their local dealers, who in turn provided some useful information on retail sales and conditions. One issue frequently highlighted was product presentation and packaging. A memorandum from Bombay in June 1857 requested ‘bright colours stout cloth’ and also advised that ‘pieces when folded ought to be tied at both ends with orange coloured thread instead of black the latter being objectionable.’⁷⁰ Another order requested bundles of five pieces, each ‘to be tied with green silk tape.’⁷¹ Being ‘well starched and folded up’ and wrapped in high quality decorated paper was routinely specified, with many detailed instructions on the folding, as when Grey & Co. directed in an October 1854 order for turban pieces,

No 202 Turkey R twills 15 inch twenty yards much admired. Care to be observed in folding which should be exactly 15 by 20 inches...in bundles of 10 pieces each in paper. 100 pieces in a case and 4 cases by a ship.⁷²

In all instances, as here, the individual dress pieces were wrapped and tied in decorative packaging presumably for show in a bazaar display. This suggests that retail consumers purchased the item still wrapped and put high store by this sort of presentation, which was not seen in Britain where textiles were sold by the yard from a role or folded bolt and where made-up garments (and the sari dress piece was closer to the latter than the former) were sold unwrapped from racks or shelves.

The labeling or ‘ticketing’ of bundles was also carefully specified, since the trade mark labels, which included complex imagery, identified the brand and quality and were important

sources of product information for local dealers and retail customers unfamiliar with English.⁷³ Both the labels for the bundles, which were the size of a modern postcard and commonly decorated with gold, and the decorative paper in which the bundles were wrapped, were areas of specialist manufacture that emerged in Glasgow and Manchester alongside the textile industry.⁷⁴ Used in packaging, they were an expensive but necessary indicator of quality that was also designed to catch the eye in competitive markets with a sophisticated consumer demand. The cost, moreover, was on top of expensive protective packaging for sea-based transport.⁷⁵ By the early twentieth century, at a time when cotton print sales in India were of an increasingly standardized character aimed at the low-end market, tickets were still used on high quality textiles as an ‘additional decorative element’.⁷⁶ In a context where it was impossible to protect the copyright on patterns, product fraud in India was often focused on the use of pirated labels attached to bundles of inferior manufactures and were prosecuted through the courts.⁷⁷ Not only of value in India, product labels and tickets also facilitated the transfer of accurate market information from India back to Britain, as seen in the BPB, since agents were able to supply samples that had sold in Bombay with a label attached, allowing firms in Britain to get an accurate insight to the business of their rivals.

Agents supplied information on prices achieved, and also on prices anticipated in light of shifting market supply and seasonally of demand. In a commentary on one sample, Grey & Co. in February 1857 stated, ‘the patterns are said to be good and well liked at present, but we fear they are rather extensive and are in but small consumption here. First arrival may realise a high price.’ The same letter requested –

a beautiful assortment of printed woolen dresses 28 inches wide and 11 yards long, each piece folded in paper with a ticket as usual. 150 pieces to a case and 2 or 3 cases

by a ship and 10 cases for the whole year. These goods ought always to arrive here before the setting in of the cold season.⁷⁸

Comparative prices were indicated, as in December 1865 in a letter with samples from Nicol & Co. sent 'with reference to their recommendations for next season's supplies', which included 'Swiss chintz prints, German dyes, sold by J. Sigg & Co at Rs 10 per piece', which was a high price for the finest quality goods. Also, a

cutting of A. Orr Ewing & Co dyes which has sold by B. & A. Harmanjee at Rs 6/15 per piece...[and a] cutting of A. Collie & Co. [Manchester] dyes which is now showing in the Bazaar. Some of the goods were sold by Ewart, Latham & Co at Rs 5/8 and subsequently a further quantity was placed at Rs5/7.⁷⁹

The India market was always competitive and long run market saturation was frequently indicated, as in a September 1866 order for Turkey red sarees in Hindu and Mohammedan patterns.⁸⁰ Though most goods dispatched to Bombay were for local sale, expansion into more distant markets was constantly under review. Some consignments were for onward transmission to other regions, with proposed patterns indicated, as in a communication from Nicol & Co. in November 1863 with a set of samples sent for market testing that was returned with the cryptic comment 'Madras patterns not very suitable [for Bombay].'⁸¹ One extensive May 1860 letter comprised a speculative consignment for the Karachi market, organized from Glasgow by James Paul, the principal partner of John Fleming & Co. who was connected with Nicol & Co. of Bombay and also had links with William McKinnon, the shipping entrepreneur who was seeking to develop a Bombay to Karachi shipping service at the time.

Referring to our conversation yesterday regarding shipment to my friends Fleming & Co. Karachi I have now pleasure in handing you the following memo for your guidance, in respect to an experimental mission direct to the port in question.

There followed a large order for Turkey red cambrics, twills, dimity, broads, mulles and jaconets along with handkerchiefs in the ‘ordinary Bombay style’ and ‘saree and hoodries – of all sizes and of the ordinary Bombay assortment.’ The consignment was recommended for the ship *Victoria and Albert*, which was due to sail from the Clyde on 10 June.⁸² Whether the experiment was a success is not recorded, but there was no repeat order from this source.

Understanding and Shaping the India Market

As the BPB letters illuminate and as is evident from John Matheson’s two lengthy visits, India represented a vast market for British cotton, expanding rapidly in the early and mid-nineteenth century as the numbers of brokers and auctioneers attest. The colonial state worked hard to block alternative supplies from elsewhere in Europe and to repress indigenous manufactures that might threaten British firms.⁸³ This, however, was not always easy when it came to high-end textiles, with fine chintzes from mainland Europe easily available at a price and where there was a well-developed taste for quality, local craft-made weaves and prints. Attempts to address the latter can be seen in formal initiatives to educate British industry on Indian consumer taste. From mid-century, imported textiles were displayed in museum collections and at the Great Exhibitions with the interests of textile manufacturers and designers in mind.⁸⁴ The most famous government initiative for raising awareness of Indian textiles took the form of volumes of textile samples with accompanying descriptions, which were circulated to manufacturing centers in the late 1860s and ‘70s by John Forbes Watson, Reporter on the Products of India.⁸⁵ Forbes Watson’s collection was described in the

Glasgow Herald, on the occasion of a set of volumes being offered to the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, as containing ‘700 working samples of cotton, silk, and woollen textiles of native manufacture, obtained from various places in India.’ Each sample in this mix of woven and printed goods was numbered, with identical numbers in each set of volumes, and ‘all are accompanied by details respecting the length, breadth, and weight etc of the pieces of which they originally formed a part.’ Twenty sets comprising eighteen volumes each were distributed in Britain and seven remained in India because of -

the opportunity which will thereby be afforded to the agent in India of directing the attention of his correspondent here [in Britain] to the articles suited to the requirements of his constituents....the agent in India may call his home correspondent’s attention to a certain number in a certain volume and ask him to send out something as like it as possible, or with such alteration as he may see fit to suggest.⁸⁶

One of the problems, however, with the Forbes-Watson volumes was the absence of information on price, which is not surprising when prices changed rapidly according to the season, local demand or market saturation. Moreover, the sets of volumes and the accompanying India Office publication *The Textile Manufactures and the Costumes of the People of India* were predicated on a western belief, an aesthetic fallacy of sorts, that the Indian high-end consumer market was for ‘traditional’ weaves and prints with designs marked by a simplicity that met with elite European approval. The samples selected were mostly of pure and austere types defined regionally and in marked contrast to the bright and stylistically hybrid prints that were sold successfully by British manufacturers. As a consequence and though receiving much contemporary recognition, nineteenth-century manufacturers almost certainly paid little real attention to these India Office sample collections.⁸⁷ Instead, entrepreneurs like Matheson relied on their own market information,

sometimes undertaken through field work on the ground but mainly drawing on a network of local agents gathering and sending samples of patterns with commentaries on how they could be bettered.

The 1860s were a boom time for Bombay traders as restrictions in American cotton supplies arising from the Civil War gave a premium to Indian cotton. Consignments of printed goods from Britain paralleled India's trade in raw cotton and though normal business resumed at the end of the war, cotton exports still generated vast profits for some of Matheson's trading partners, such as brothers John and James Nicol Fleming, his Bombay hosts and marked the start of a swift rise in the importance of India and particularly Bombay in the trade of Glasgow, which from 1866 was the leading destination for tonnage exports from the Clyde, remaining so for the rest of the century.⁸⁸ Bombay's prominence was a function of geography, giving it natural advantages in onward trade with the Middle East and Africa and being the first point of contact for Europeans traveling overland from the Mediterranean via Alexandria and Aden (such as Matheson and his party in 1861) or later via the Suez Canal. It was a focus also for internal migration mainly from northern India that gave rise to a four-fold increase in the city's population between 1818 and 1864, when it numbered 800,000.⁸⁹ It had a complex British-owned commercial infrastructure which evolved during East India Company rule and a system of agency houses to repatriate the wealth of British returnees.⁹⁰ Bombay's growth in the 1850s and '60s was also a function of the ethnic mix in the local trading population, which included large numbers of Parsee businessmen, who were widely respected in European merchant networks and in some instances formed partnerships with British trading houses, generating admiring comments from Matheson amongst others: 'The Parsee broker of Bombay is a man of mark in the mercantile system...a highly capable man of business; affable, sober, punctual, vigilant.'⁹¹ One of those who traded with Stirling for

several decades was Framji Patel, a partner in the company Frith & Co., which was renamed Wallace & Co. in 1848 and evolved into a major world-wide trading, banking and agency business.⁹² Although Calcutta was equal in size and had a similar structure of banks and joint stock companies to those seen in Bombay, the latter had a more integrated business community as seen in the Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1836 two years after the same body in Calcutta, but representing local businesses as well as European.⁹³ Bombay's Parsee businesses were well connected in India and their businessmen travelled to Europe, including Glasgow, to take part in exhibitions of Indian goods and established retail outlets in elite thoroughfares such as London's Regents Street.⁹⁴ The centrality of migrant traders was signaled in market information provided to Stirling by Bombay agents Grey & Co in February 1857 when they reported with reference to a recommendation for Turkey red printed mulls, 'these goods are in large consumption among the Marwarree people especially', the latter a sub-group of Hindu Jains, originating in Rajasthan, who were important money lenders and dominated many inland business networks.⁹⁵

The vibrancy, openness and commercial opportunity that was focused on Bombay was a function of its cosmopolitan mix along with good trading routes along the coast and into inland areas that were facilitated by the Chamber of Commerce, which lobbied for improved transport infrastructures, modern roads and early developments in railway and steam shipping services.⁹⁶ Though not illustrated in the BPB, a sample elsewhere in the Scottish Turkey red pattern book collection, probably made by John Orr Ewing & Co. in the 1860s, shows a sari end-piece made up of an elaborate traditional peacock design framing stylized steam train motifs, the latter a recent introduction to India.⁹⁷ Indeed, the design may have been timed to commemorate the opening of the Bombay to Surat railway line, the first long-distance inter-city route in India, in 1864. There was clearly a market for such novelties in Bombay and

British firms employed designers at home to come up with new ideas, though certain pattern trials in the BPB, including one showing milk maids and cow herds in Indian dress, were returned by agents with an emphatic 'not suitable' label attached; the reasons not given, but probably connected with religious sensibilities concerning men and women depicted together.⁹⁸

The Indian market as represented by Bombay was perceived to be vast but extending beyond that great city into other cities and regions was a challenge when the sub-continent was shaped by a multitude of religious and local tastes. Attempts to take consignments elsewhere were not always met with success as Matheson found in Madras.

The piece-goods dealers, with whom I spent the mid-day period, divided between the warehouse and the bazaar, differed from those of Bombay not only.... in the absence of style both as regards dress and manner, but in the exercise of what may be termed a fossilized conservatism of taste as to pattern or colouring, which excludes even a shadow of variation.⁹⁹

Moreover, issues of 'taste' were compounded by local and, for outsiders, hard to predict idiosyncrasies in demand, which Indian craftsmen were better able to accommodate.¹⁰⁰ John Matheson gained a personal insight to such difficulties during his India tour.

In the present year [1861] Glasgow shippers of certain fancy goods were advised by their correspondents in Calcutta that such fabrics would be unsaleable for a time, the cause not being one of those which regulate the laws of supply and demand as indicated by Adam Smith or any similar economists, but being due solely to the fact that March and April were held to be unlucky months for marriages, as predicted by the priesthood of Benarez. Indian lovers, thus forewarned, prudently declined being united till the ill fated period had run its course, and so the calico chintz flowers and

bright coloured peacocks intended to adorn them on the occasion must needs be regarded in the interval as useless stock.¹⁰¹

The only device for navigating the cultural minefield that the Indian market represented, was to employ the best informed local agents. In most years, Stirling's Bombay business was transacted by two or three agents with a handful dominating over many years. Not surprisingly, the majority of the correspondents were Scots-owned firms, which made sense because of both the personal connections they provided, with many having managing partners who were Matheson's friends, but also because of their dominant role in the Bombay Chamber of Commerce.¹⁰² Typical here was W. Nicol & Co., Scottish owned and a major commercial force in India whose agency business, part of a larger concern, generated 24% of communications in the BPB, undertaken as a personal favor to Matheson and focused on mid-market prints.¹⁰³ Or the firm of Grey & Co., the third-ranked of Stirling's Bombay agents with 10% of BPB communications, which had strong Glasgow connections through the principal partner, Gavin Steel, who was Matheson's boyhood friend. Yet, despite the importance of established Scottish business networks and personal connections, the most important by volume of the BPB correspondence was A. H. Huschke & Co., accounting for 37% of all letters and orders, who were not Scottish at all.

The firm of Huschke was part of a long-established Swiss-Indian connection that began in the eighteenth century when Swiss manufacturers of fine cotton prints for European consumption began exploiting Indian imported textiles for design inspiration. This gave rise to what were known as Swiss chintzes, characterized by small, mostly floral print motifs, which in turn were exported to India through specialist India-based Swiss agents along with other European luxuries such as watches and clocks for an elite market that placed a high premium on western-made consumer goods.¹⁰⁴ Huschke, a moderate exporters of raw cotton during the

cotton boom, was mostly active as a specialist importers of quality goods for the fashion market.¹⁰⁵ Mindful of their reputation for luxury cottons, Huschke as an agency was party to one of the first trademark protection court cases in India in 1865, when it sought, successfully, to preserve the exclusivity of its brand of wares as made by Egg, Zeilger, Greuter & Co. of Winterthur in Switzerland, manufacturers of finest quality Turkey red Swiss chintz prints. As described in the *Times of India*, ‘from their superior manufacture, they acquired a high reputation, were in great demand, and sold at a higher price than goods of a similar make.’¹⁰⁶ August Henry Huschke, the founder, of Swiss-German family background, was a long-time resident in Bombay, married there in 1841 to the daughter of a Hamburg-based Swiss merchant¹⁰⁷ and was of a generation of Swiss merchants and textile manufacturers who pioneered the practices of market information gathering.¹⁰⁸ His firm was sold when he died in 1866, passing to the ownership of John Tebbut Bell, a former junior, with offices in Manchester and later in London.¹⁰⁹ It was still trading in the 1870s when Bell retired.¹¹⁰

Stirling’s reliance on Huschke & Co., when coupled with analysis of the firm’s product lines, signal an intention to engage with a high quality and dynamic market where elements of changing tastes could be informed by western fashions. Moreover, Matheson’s personal visit and published thoughts on the manufacturing economy of India underlined his interest in such sales. He was thorough in his approach to market research. For example, in a chapter titled ‘Indigenous Industries’ he offered descriptions of and commentary on what he saw by way of native enterprises along with extended case studies based on personal interviews, quoted at length, with named Indian artisans and entrepreneurs engaged in all areas of textile production.¹¹¹ He charted the increase in machine production in India, particularly in Bombay and noted the large manufacturing establishments that were coming into existence, some with

as many as 1,600 employees, but was convinced that this would only ever produce ‘certain stout and bulky fabrics’ of little threat to British-made finer cloths.¹¹² Indeed, he perceived these limitations as operating across the industrial spectrum.

Such establishments as rum distilleries, biscuit manufactories, engineering, tanning, rope-spinning, shawl and carpet weaving, calico printing and dyeing works, exist to some extent in great communities, or scattered at intervals throughout the rural districts [but] they are, with scarcely an exception, conducted in a rough fashion and on a small scale.¹¹³

He was confident that the British command of the Indian textile market ‘is becoming more and more our own’ and would lead to the ‘gradual extinction of the hand-loom, and those other rough old modes of native manufactures which still hold their ground in the more retired rural districts.’¹¹⁴ He was, of course, wrong. Indeed, in India as in other parts of the world, such as South America, native artisans using hand techniques continued to thrive despite the availability of modern textile goods imported from Britain and Europe.¹¹⁵

Matheson knew full well that the quality of the high-end local craft production was outstanding, though expensive and exclusive to the elite. What he could not see, however, even though it was presaged in the evolving sales profile of his own firm in the 1860s, was the degree to which the market for printed cotton in India was met by craftsmen in Indian workshops using hand techniques to discharge and print their own designs onto British-produced plain red cloth, generating a hybrid product – part machine-made in Britain and part hand-made in India – where the added value remained in India. The reasons for this relate to Indian consumer preferences of the last three decades of the nineteenth century, which were shaped by westernised sensibilities linked to a celebration of localised cultural norms.

If the 1850s through to the early 1870s represented a period of unprecedented opportunity for British Turkey red prints in India, facilitated by advances in the transport infrastructure, much of it led by Scottish entrepreneurs like Matheson's friend William McKinnon, the same transport links also allowed Indian visits to Europe, with complex cultural exchanges resulting.¹¹⁶ The mid-nineteenth century saw changes in western consumer culture through industrial exhibitions and new departmental stores and elements of that consumer culture were evident in India. By the 1870s, ready-made clothing such as tailored Indian-style men's coats for the local market were commonly advertised by Bombay department stores.¹¹⁷ Additionally, newspaper reports hinted at the ways in which some young Indian women expressed their western-influenced fashionable flair. In the early 1880s, for instance, an extensive article titled 'The Parsee Girl of the Period' by social commentator N.S. Ginwalla, providing a parallel to a similarly named English commentary the 'Girl of the Period', reflected on the changing manners, abandoned traditions and emulative costume of women in this wealthy, cosmopolitan business class.¹¹⁸ 'It is her ambition to look and act every bit the English lady; she dresses in a semi-English fashion, in English shoes and stockings' though he also concedes 'her bright saree are still native.' Moreover, though this was a conventional satirical attack on perceived female excess that generated a lively letter correspondence thereafter, 'the worst of it all is that the Parsee Young Lady's love of luxury is shared by the Parsee Young Gentleman.' Changes such as these were much in line with what Matheson and others expected and doubtless had implications for some areas of British manufacturing.¹¹⁹ But running parallel with such trends were other equally important cultural shifts with significant implications for British textile sales, including a growing resentment of the imposition of western dress norms. This antipathy, seen in the pejorative account of 'the Parsee girl' was signaled again through the pages of the *Times of India* when a letter of 1875 signed B. C. C. Bandoopwalla called on the British governing class to stop insisting on

western dress for Indian male participants at formal state occasions. ‘As rational beings, we should be allowed our own choice in all matters of taste, especially in the common taste of dressing as we please...’¹²⁰ A movement was gaining pace, of a sort also seen in Europe and in Scotland and Ireland, that linked textiles and dress to national identity and though it was some decades before this became a mass political force in India, the harnessing of clothing cultures to calls for Indian autonomy was signposted.¹²¹

Matheson failed to fully understand the Indian consumer, but the situation was more complex than a simple choice between local products with high political-cultural value and western imports with their modern associations. As historians and anthropologists have subsequently shown, there was, in addition to a tension between European and Indian dress cultures a shifting pattern of consumption among the Hindu population from the norm of unsewn garments – the sari, dhoti or turban made from a single piece draped and pinned on the body – towards sewn garments such as trousers, jackets and blouses, conventionally associated with Muslim dress culture and favoured in Anglo-Indian circles and in towns as work wear. This was not just a case of some Indians dressing in or rejecting western fashions, though that dynamic was in play, but rather the colonial project itself favouring one style of Indian clothing over another, with implications, largely unseen at the time, for the Turkey red piece-goods manufacturers who specialised in unsewn garments.¹²² Add to this the simple fact that Indian clothing consumption was not dictated by individual consumer preferences alone, but was also commonly tied to gifting and ceremonial or ritual events, then it is not surprising that Matheson and other cotton entrepreneurs had only a partial understanding of their customers’ motives despite extensive research.

A further critical issues that is indicated in Matheson's observations and in the BPB more generally is the absence of any capacity to shape sales in India through active marketing. The BPB letters reveal how consumer information was channelled through agents on the ground, who in turn relied on their own local informants, the Indian bazaar merchants who purchased most of the product. Many of the bazaar merchants sold in bulk for onward trade within and beyond Bombay and did so simultaneously with their trade in locally manufactured and hand-crafted goods. These multiple layers of British and Indian businessmen generated a vast gulf between the original producer and the consumer whether the latter was urban, which most of them probably were, or rural. India's complex market embraced demand for print novelties, giving rise, as we have seen, to design innovation and market trials, as well as demand for more traditional prints and there were seasonal changes in popular colours. But marketing from producer to consumer was impossible. There were no Indian fashion magazines or newspaper commentaries for the woman reader as seen in Britain or Europe and though departmental stores existed by the 1860s, they advertised to European customers, who did not regard Turkey red as a fashionable dress material or to Indian customers for sewn garments, which were not made of Turkey red. The advertiser's language of 'latest fashions' or 'new season' were used by Indian retailers in Bombay from the 1830s, but only where the intended customer was European.¹²³

This is not to say that contemporary observers in India were not keen to develop some of the same marketing strategies that were seen in Britain, as the following *Times of India* account of the Manchester Calico Ball attests.

The dressmakers of Bombay, as elsewhere, display their most tempting wares upon very elegant lay figures, but it has remained for the calico printers of Manchester to press into their service 1,200 young handsome ladies as a still more attractive

advertisement for their goods. On the 25th ultimo a grand annual ball was given at the Manchester Town Hall, with the object of showing the variety and perfection to which the art of calico has arrived. The rule laid down by the Ball Committee, all eminent British calico printers, was that the ladies who graced the ball with their presence should, without exception, consent to wear costumes of English calico, printed within Manchester or Glasgow. “All the ladies’ dresses,” says the *Times*, “were made of British printed cotton, the latest designs of the trade, and even some which are not yet in the market, had been made into ordinary ball dresses. Many very handsome costumes were worn, and the display showed that these cottons can be as effectively treated as more fashionable materials.” There is an odd mixture of gallantry and business in this enterprising undertaking that should commend it to many in Bombay. But it is difficult to see how the same principle can be applied during our present festive season here, where the buyers, being natives are not dancing men.¹²⁴

The event, widely reported in the press, included extensive details of patterns, colors and dress designs in the manner of contemporary fashion journalism. But the final sentence hits the nub of the matter in India, for the ‘buyers’, the Indian bazaar dealers, were not ‘dancing men’ and the Indian women who ultimately consumed most of the imported printed cottons led very different lives to those in Britain and were not in the same market position to make choices through information gained from advertising and shop browsing.¹²⁵ Indeed, as studies of Asian dress fashions elsewhere have show, it is only when women as independent consumers were empowered to make their own retail choices, which mostly happened from the early twentieth century, that distinctive national fashion cultures fueled by advertising and modern marketing emerged.¹²⁶

The only form of advertising employed by the Turkey red manufacturers was their elaborate tickets or bale labels, which were used to denote the manufacturers' name, the quality and size of the textile piece and through visual imagery, give an insight to how they were positioned in the market. The Scottish Turkey red manufacturers were noted for their elaborate, highly-colored and gilded labels and many survive in archive collections.¹²⁷ Their iconography is mostly evocative of traditional high-status India themes, including princely processions of bedecked horses or elephants, exotic birds and animals such as peacocks, parrots and tigers, images of Indian deities or beautiful women in secluded gardens. The audience for these labels, which reinforced certain Indian cultural tropes and values which were in opposition to a modernizing western agenda, was both the eventual retail consumer and the local merchant intermediaries in the bazaars. The latter were described extensively by Matheson and figured in a striking visual illustration in *England to Delhi* under the title 'piece-goods merchants' where they are shown with samples and folded dress pieces decorated with labels.¹²⁸ The former, that is the retail customers who purchased from the bazaar merchants, were not directly interrogated by Matheson or his agents.

Bazaar commercial practices and culture and how these related to local demand and consumption were fluid, mutable and barely understood by outsiders. Even today, historians of Indian business struggle to reconcile a narrative informed by 'hegemonic Western knowledge' and big business interests with local realities and knowledge that have been shaped by the long evolution of bazaar trade.¹²⁹ As recent commentary has revealed, the bazaar appeared chaotic and inefficient to nineteenth century western business observers, but 'it commanded its own complex and sophisticated form of organization finely adjusted over centuries' based on ethnic communities and trading families mediated by distinctive notions of trust and honorable business practice.¹³⁰ It was neither static nor backward referencing,

but contained within it its own modernizing dynamic in response to colonialization.¹³¹ These characteristics, alongside the multiple layers of middle men, highly decentralized markets and price variations, tenacious despite advances in transport infrastructure such as railway and steam ship services, limited the western capacity to understand the Indian market or effect any form of coherent shaping of consumer demand.¹³² This inability was compounded by frustrations at some of the known behaviors of bazaar traders, which included a willingness to operate with much lower profit margins than was acceptable to western businesses and habits of personal attire and presentation that were confounding for observers such as Matheson. ‘Between the considerable trader ensconced among his high piles of piece goods, or store of bales and boxes, and the vendor of a paltry handkerchief in the crowd, there may be no difference in appearance.’¹³³

Conclusion

So, what does this interrogation of agents letters, pattern samples, an entrepreneurs written account of his India tour and newspaper commentaries allow us to conclude on approaches to selling printed cottons in India.

The first thing to say is that Matheson and others had access to a great deal of information about their markets through their own business practices, through correspondents on the ground and through published sources. They understood pricing variations, the stress on quality and packaging and were keenly aware of the tension between periodic shortages and over supply. They knew there was a fashion dynamic in some elements of the printed cotton market, with seasonal changes in colour preferences and some demand for novelty designs sufficient for regular trials of new patterns to be attempted. Over the years represented by the

BPB there were changes in the types of design sent to India, with a growing stress on large floral motifs that also sold well in Europe. Moreover, there was no shortage of understanding of what the Indian consumer conventionally did with the textiles that they purchased, since British-produced guides to Indian dress gave details. Foremost here was Forbes Watson's *Textile Manufacturers and Costumes of the People of India*, published in 1866 to accompany the 'mobile museum'. Watson stressed the importance to the British textile manufacturer of their knowing how Indian garments were worn and he provided copious information on the different sizes and types of cloth and their decoration that match well with the range indicated in the BPB. Amongst the myriad of textiles produced in India it was the printed cotton dress pieces, used mainly as unsewn garments such as saris for women where, he suggested, the best markets were to be found for British manufacturers and again this corresponds with the agents' reports and with practice in the Scottish factories, where expensive hand printing for such dress pieces was retained.¹³⁴ Yet neither Forbes Watson, nor the BPB agents, nor Matheson himself could fully comprehend the degree to which clothing cultures in colonial India were dynamic and contested. Matheson saw and welcomed westernisation but did not see the reasons why some in India chose to value traditional textiles, which he dismissed as mere conservatism, or why unsewn dress pieces were being replaced by some consumers with ready-made sewn garments.

Matheson knew that the India market was heavily segmented by regions and ethnicities and he also knew, since it was a constant refrain of the BPB letters, that his markets were often glutted. So, though the period covered by the BPB and Matheson's India visits signal a high point in market optimism based on the situation in Bombay, the contemporary record also reveals its frailties. The BPB letters represent a system of market information gathering that was both reactive and speculative but incorporated almost no capacity for active marketing

through advertising. Its narrative is one of fluctuating and sometimes saturated markets, attempts to predict what might happen based on limited information, occasional suggestions at innovation by way of an experiment and demand for endless variety. The only constant was that quality products of consistent weight and appearance with attractive presentation had the best chance of succeeding, but even that was not enough. One of the most telling comments in the BPB is that detailed above requesting the need for two selvedges on a piece of velvet that had been split along its length, which was nothing to do with colour or print, but with the size of the original textile piece, with a recommendation that in order to sell in India in future, it had to be woven to narrower dimensions. Whether or not that narrower velvet piece was ever produced is not revealed, but such pressures towards increasingly exacting standards and an ever-greater variety of piece sizes to meet a myriad of consumer demands, recognized but imperfectly understood and without any capacity to shape the market through advertising, was not sustainable. It is not surprising, therefore, that these forces harnessed to changes in the way the trade was organized and the triumph of synthetic dyes over expensive natural Turkey red gave rise to eventual rationalization towards lower quality and standardized products which were cheaper to produce at home and easier to sell abroad.

John Matheson died in 1878 and did not see any of this ahead. Textile samples for copying were still sent by agents in India, as late nineteenth-century Glasgow court cases over copyright infringement reveal,¹³⁵ but the larger multinational operations, mostly directed by layers of merchant intermediaries in Britain, had neither willingness nor the necessary insights to provide their manufacturing clients with such minutely detailed business reports on the vagaries of India's markets as were sent in the 1850s and '60s and recorded in the BPB. Moreover, local production in India was tenacious, India's own design innovation was

cultivated and rewarded through late nineteenth century art colleges, exhibitions and competitions and factory output evolved to its own dynamic.¹³⁶ As reported in 1883 by Indian journalist, 'F.H.C'., on attending the Punjab Calcutta Exhibition,

Possibly the most interesting of all the Punjab exhibits is the splendid collection of cotton printed goods, which proves that the cotton printing of the Punjab still survives and defies Manchester and Glasgow to extinguish it.¹³⁷

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Textile design on paper, c.1862-8. From the 'Drawer's Book', NMS Turkey Red Pattern Book Collection. A.1962.1266.31.8.170. Copyright National Museums Scotland.

Fig. 2. Design for cylinder printed cotton comprising a collage of paper and fabric pieces mounted on paper, c.1880s. NMS Turkey Red Pattern Book Collection. A.1962.1266.9.5.6687. Copyright National Museums Scotland.

Fig. 3. Textile sample with cut-out textile motifs and paper labels attached to show design changes for printing, c.1880s. NMS Turkey Red Pattern Book Collection. A.1962.1266.28.1. Labels. Copyright National Museums Scotland.

Fig. 4. Textile samples with written commentary on patterns, colors, prices and sales from India agent A. H. Huschke & Co., 12 February 1863. Bombay Pattern Book, page 77. NMS Turkey Red Pattern Book Collection. A.1962.1266.31.6. Copyright National Museums Scotland.

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END NOTES

¹ Church, “New perspectives.”

² Clayton, “Buy British.”

³ Tadajewski and Jones, “Historical research.”

⁴ The study is based on the United Turkey Red Co. Ltd business papers in the University of Glasgow Scottish Business Archives and Manchester County Record Office and surviving textile patterns books in the National Museums Scotland.

⁵ National Museum Scotland, Turkey Red Collection. Bombay Pattern Book [hereafter NMS-BPB].

⁶ Matheson, *England to Delhi*.

⁷ Bremner, *Industries of Scotland*.

⁸ Sandberg, *Study in Entrepreneurship*; Mary Rose, *Firms, Networks*; Broadberry and Gupta, “Lancashire, India”; Cooke, *Scottish Cotton Industry*.

⁹ Lemire, *Fashion’s Favourites*; Riello and Parthasarathi, *Spinning World*.

¹⁰ For example, Crill, *Chintz*.

¹¹ Chapman, “Quantity versus quality”; Brown, “Imperfect competition.”

¹² Chapman, “British agency houses”; Howe, “Business community”; Hazareesingh, “Interconnected synchronicities.”

¹³ Engel, “Colouring markets.”

¹⁴ Tara, “From ‘primitive’ artisans.”

¹⁵ Roy, “Out of tradition.”

¹⁶ Varman and Sreekumar, “Locating the past.”

¹⁷ Engel, “Colouring markets.”

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- ¹⁸ Farnie, *English Cotton*; Tarrant, “Turkey Red”; Chenciner, *Madder Red*; Papillon, “Method of dyeing cotton.”
- ¹⁹ Nenadic and Tuckett, *Colouring the Nation*, ch. 5.
- ²⁰ Bremner, *Industries of Scotland*, 302.
- ²¹ Chapman, “Commercial sector.”
- ²² *Memoirs and Portraits*, 88.
- ²³ Nenadic, “Designers.”
- ²⁴ Brenner, *Industries of Scotland*, 297-304.
- ²⁵ *Building News*, 18 May 1860, 403.
- ²⁶ *Glasgow Post Office Directory, 1865-66*, 371.
- ²⁷ *Memoirs and Portraits*, 63.
- ²⁸ Matheson, *England to Delhi*.
- ²⁹ Munro, *Maritime Enterprise*, 43-53.
- ³⁰ Clough, “Muir family”. *ODNB*.
- ³¹ Matheson, *England to Delhi*, vii.
- ³² Matheson, *England to Delhi*, 522.
- ³³ Nenadic and Tuckett, *Colouring the Nation*.
- ³⁴ *Aberdeen Journal*, 23 June 1875. An example is furnished by Colley & Co, whose history and mutations are detailed in an obituary of the Aberdeen-born founder.
- ³⁵ Chapman, “British agency houses.”
- ³⁶ Lubinski, “Global trade.”
- ³⁷ Nenadic and Tuckett, *Colouring the Nation*.
- ³⁸ Manchester County Record Officer [hereafter MCRO]. UTR Minute Book no. 3.
- ³⁹ *Times of India*, 4 Aug. 1903.
- ⁴⁰ Sykas, “Abundant images and scant text.”

⁴¹ For a similar document employed by a Norwich shawl-making firm in the 1790s see, Mitchell, “A market place in miniature.” See also pattern book use in South America.

Llorca-Jana, *British Textile Trade*.

⁴² There are c.200 volumes in total.

⁴³ Miller, “Innovation and industrial espionage.”

⁴⁴ Greysmith, “Patterns, piracy.”

⁴⁵ Nenadic, “Designers.” Nenadic and Tuckett, *Colouring the Nation*.

⁴⁶ Potter, *Calico Printing*, 30, 54.

⁴⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 19 January 1855.

⁴⁸ Nenadic, “Designers,” 123-5.

⁴⁹ See, Nenadic and Tuckett, *Colouring the Nation*, 50-57.

⁵⁰ Nenadic, “Designers,” 116.

⁵¹ NMS-BPB, 77.

⁵² Matheson *England to Delhi*, 69.

⁵³ Ibid, 72-5. See also, Aldous, “Rehabilitating the intermediary.”

⁵⁴ University of Cambridge Library, Jardine Matheson Archive. MSJM/G11. Prices Current and Market Reports: Calcutta, 1858-73.

⁵⁵ *Straits Times*, 3 Aug. 1852. “Monthly Market Report.”

⁵⁶ NMS-BPB, 33.

⁵⁷ Greysmith, “Patterns, piracy.”

⁵⁸ NMS-BPB, 216. From A. Collie & Co.

⁵⁹ See patterns for cotton prints, dominated by blue, mauve and pale green, in Edinburgh University Library Research Collections, RECA.MS.26. Textile Sample Book: Album containing swatches of lightweight printed calico fabrics from manufacturers in Mulhouse

and the surround area of the Alsace, assembled by a Parisian agency as design intelligence, 1865-70.

⁶⁰ NMS-BPB, 124. 8 Aug. 1864.

⁶¹ NMS-BPB, 180. 23 Aug. 1866.

⁶² NMS-BPB, 24. Huschke & Co, 16 Jan. 1856.

⁶³ NMS-BPB, 10. 28 Sept. 1854.

⁶⁴ NMS-BPB, 236. 9 Sept. 1867.

⁶⁵ NMS-BPB, 163.

⁶⁶ NMS-BPB, 152.

⁶⁷ NMS-BPB, 222. 3 Jan. 1867.

⁶⁸ NMS- BPB, 42.

⁶⁹ Bremner, *Industries of Scotland*, 302.

⁷⁰ NMS-BPB, 38.

⁷¹ NMS-BPB, 236. Forbes & Co., 9 Sept. 1867.

⁷² NMS-BPB, 9.

⁷³ Zangger, "Chops and trademarks."

⁷⁴ Nenadic, "Designers."

⁷⁵ Llorca Jana, *British Textile Trade*, estimates the cost of effective sea-worthy packaging could be greater than insurance costs and the value of the goods transported. 55-7.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Zangger, "Chops and trademarks," 781.

⁷⁷ Higgins and Tweedale, "Trade mark question." *Times of India*, 28 Aug. 1889.

⁷⁸ NMS-BPB, 33.

⁷⁹ NMS-BPB, 159.

⁸⁰ NMS-BPB, 177. Ewart, Latham & Co.

⁸¹ NMS-BPB, 113. Nicol & Co.

⁸² NMS-BPB, 59.

⁸³ Aldous, “Rehabilitating the intermediary”; Roy, “Trading firms”; Lubinski, “Global trade and Indian politics.”

⁸⁴ Nenadic, “Exhibiting India.”

⁸⁵ Driver and Ashmore, “Mobile museum.”

⁸⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, 15 Aug. 1866.

⁸⁷ Some small-town Yorkshire woolen manufacturers are a possible exception. See, Lyons, “Textile fabrics of India.”

⁸⁸ Jackson and Munn, “Trade, commerce.”

⁸⁹ Markovits, *Merchants, Traders*, 131.

⁹⁰ Webster, “Strategies and limits.”

⁹¹ Matheson, *England to Delhi*, 74.

⁹² London Metropolitan Archives. GB 0074 CLC/B/207-8. Wallace Brothers & Co. (Holdings) Ltd.

⁹³ Markovits, *Merchants, Traders*, 144-5. Wacha, *Financial Chapter*, 9-10.

⁹⁴ Mukharji, *Visit to Europe*.

⁹⁵ NMS-BPB, 33. On the spread of Marwarwarree businesses, see Markovits, *Merchants, Traders*, 197-203.

⁹⁶ Webster, *Twilight*, 116.

⁹⁷ NMS A.1962.1266.31.9.627.

⁹⁸ NMS-BPB, 50. Huschke & Co., 9 Feb. 1859.

⁹⁹ Matheson, *England to Delhi*, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Twomey, “Employment.”

¹⁰¹ Matheson, *England to Delhi*, 251.

¹⁰² Wacha, *Financial Chapter*, 9-10.

¹⁰³ The company found itself in financial trouble in India in the late 1860s and failed in the 1870s. See Hazareesingh, “Chasing commodities.”

¹⁰⁴ Smith, “Swiss connection.”

¹⁰⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 30 Dec. 1861. “The Cotton Trade of Bombay.”

¹⁰⁶ *Times of India*, 14 Jul. 1865. “Alleged Violation of a Trade Mark.”

¹⁰⁷ *Bombay Calendar and Almanac*, 1841, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Zangger, “Chops and trademarks,” 775.

¹⁰⁹ *London Gazette*, 8 Jun. 1866.

¹¹⁰ *Manchester Commercial List*, 1873, 9.

¹¹¹ Matheson, *England to Delhi*, 475-77.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 81-2.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 466.

¹¹⁴ Matheson, *England to Delhi*, 82.

¹¹⁵ Llorca Jana, *British Trade*, Ch. 8.

¹¹⁶ Munro, *Maritime Enterprise*.

¹¹⁷ *Times of India*, 21 Nov. 1879, advertising spread for Gleenblatt & Co. Depot for Ready Made Clothing.

¹¹⁸ *Times of India*, 19 April 1884. See also, Linton, *The Girl of the Period*.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, the decorative glass industry. Ahlawat, “Empire of Glass.”

¹²⁰ *Times of India*, 30 Oct. 1875.

¹²¹ Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation*.

¹²² Cohn, “Cloth, clothes and Colonialism.” Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*.

¹²³ *Times of India*, 7 Sept. 1839. Advertisement by Beeyajee Admedbhoy of Bombay.

¹²⁴ *Times of India*, 18 Feb. 1882. The term ‘calico’ included Turkey red prints.

¹²⁵ Furedy, “Development of modern elite retailing.”

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- ¹²⁶ Wada, 'Kimono mode.'
- ¹²⁷ University of Oxford, John Johnson Collection.
- ¹²⁸ Matheson, *England to Delhi*, 246-7.
- ¹²⁹ Varman and Sreekumar, "Locating the past."
- ¹³⁰ Ray, "Bazaar."
- ¹³¹ Ray, "Asian capital."
- ¹³² Sreekumar and Varman, "History of marketing in India."
- ¹³³ Matheson, *England to Delhi*, 76.
- ¹³⁴ Watson, *Textile Manufactures*, 90.
- ¹³⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 5 April 1899.
- ¹³⁶ *Times of India*, 30 March 1903. Report on the Bombay Art Society Exhibition, founded in 1888, which included student prizes for printed cotton designs.
- ¹³⁷ *Times of India*, 22 Oct, 1883.